

4-1-1951

What Makes A Master Editor?

Leslie G

Follow this and additional works at: <https://ir.uiowa.edu/palimpsest>

Part of the [United States History Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

G, L. "What Makes A Master Editor?." *The Palimpsest* 32 (1951), 161-174.

Available at: <https://ir.uiowa.edu/palimpsest/vol32/iss4/3>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the State Historical Society of Iowa at Iowa Research Online. It has been accepted for inclusion in The Palimpsest by an authorized administrator of Iowa Research Online. For more information, please contact lib-ir@uiowa.edu.

What Makes a Master Editor?

The journalist nominated for preliminary consideration for an Iowa Master Editor-Publisher award is himself a chosen man. He has in a sense passed a long, almost continuous screening by his fellows, who have watched him in action and who have seen his product through the years — and have judged the product and the man behind it. This process, seldom conscious, seldom thought-out, puts the nominee into a group of "possibles" — good prospects to meet the standards of the award's founder, the late Grant L. Caswell, that the Master Editor-Publisher must have "worked hard, lived honorably, thought soundly, and influenced unselfishly."

The nominee, who must be "living and active," usually comes into this preliminary list through a letter written in response to a request for nominations in the Iowa Press Association bulletin. These letters go to the two men who alternate, year by year, as chairman of the selection committee — the head of the Department of Technical Journalism at Iowa State College at Ames, currently Professor Kenneth R. Marvin, or the director of the School of Journalism at the State University of Iowa, currently Professor Leslie G. Moeller, and to the

three or four or possibly five other Iowa newspapermen (usually including two or more Master Editor-Publishers) who complete the committee.

At the group's session, in February or March, the committee also considers nominations remaining from earlier years; nominations are also infrequently made during the meeting itself. The committee comes to its work with a century or more of experience in and contact with Iowa newspapering, and in most cases all or nearly all members will have known each nominee for many years.

With this background, the committee does not normally spend much time in discussion of each candidate. Generally, after talking over such points as community service, work for the profession, achievements in journalism, and journalistic honors earned, the balloting begins. Usually a succession of secret ballots is taken on a gradually smaller list of nominees.

In this process, the great concern, although it is not usually put formally into words, is, "How does he measure up as a good editor and publisher?" There is little discussion of such matters as character and honesty, presumably because the quality of the nominees is such that this discussion would not particularly be in point. Nor is attention paid to size of paper or of community, degree of financial success, extent of holdings, or education.

Age is a factor always considered. The first eight men named had an average age of 69.5 years,

and the youngest was 55. At the same time, age has not outweighed other factors. The average age at time of election was 65.9 for the first 29 men selected and 63.9 for the 29 most recently chosen. The oldest man to receive the award was Joseph F. Grawe of the *Bremer County Independent*, who was 89 when he was honored in the first group chosen, in 1932, and the youngest was James W. McCutcheon of the Mount Vernon *Hawkeye-Record*, 42 when he was named in 1945.

Of the 58 Master Editor-Publishers named from 1932 through 1951, 25 are now dead. Of the first 29 named, 18 are now dead, with an average age of 76.5 years at time of death. Of the most recent 29, 7 are dead, with 67.4 years the average age at death.

The 58 award winners averaged 42.5 years in journalism at the time of receiving the award. C. S. Walling of the Oskaloosa *Herald* was active for the greatest number of years, 63; and Paul A. Olson of the Story City *Herald* and John W. Haggard of the Algona *Upper Des Moines* were next in line with 61 years each. The shortest such periods of service are those of James W. McCutcheon, with 20 years, and Paul C. Smith of the Rock Rapids *Lyon County Reporter*, with 23.

One man, J. F. Grawe, was born in Westphalia, Germany. Of the others, 39 were born in Iowa and 18 elsewhere in the United States. Biographical data are not always clear, but it appears that

22 were born in towns under 1,000; 12 in towns of 1,000 to 2,500; 4 in towns of 2,500 to 5,000; 5 in towns of 5,000 to 25,000; and 2 in towns over 25,000; 12 were born in "X" county, with no further description, presumably therefore on farms.

Of the first 29 chosen, 6 at the time of selection were publishers in communities of 1,000 to 2,500 population; 14 from 2,500 to 5,000; 5 from 5,000 to 25,000; and 3 over 25,000. (Caswell was not a publisher at the time of his selection). In the second 29 there is a shift toward both the smaller and the larger communities, with 8 chosen from towns 1,000 to 2,500; 6 from 2,500 to 5,000; 13 from 5,000 to 25,000; and 2 over 25,000.

Eighteen Master Editor-Publishers were on dailies at the time of their selection. Of this number at least five had previously worked on weeklies. The ratio suggested by the founder of the award, that "not more than one daily newspaper editor or publisher shall receive such award in any one year, while all three awards may be made to editors or publishers of papers issued less frequently," has been carefully observed except for 1948, when the judges decided that the parallel careers of Phil Hoffmann and C. S. Walling for 60 years on the same paper, the Oskaloosa *Herald*, required their being honored at the same time.

All of the 58 were married, and all but six had children. This group had 75 sons and 69 daughters, an average of 2.48 children for the 58 men.

Of the 58 Master Editor-Publishers, 23 received the B.A. or other four-year college degree. One received two honorary LL.D. degrees, four earned the LL.B. degree, and one the M.A. Fourteen received college training, but no degree; 13 list education as "high school" or "academy," and 8 list their education as "grammar," or rural schools, or public schools. Of the 37 who attended college, 33 attended colleges or universities in Iowa. Of the 29 most recently chosen, 13 have college degrees and 8 others attended college. Of those attending college, only 3, all 51 years old or younger at the time of receiving the award, obtained degrees in journalism.

Twenty-eight of the Master Editor-Publishers are members of Sigma Delta Chi, the national professional journalism fraternity; of these, five apparently became members as students.

Records show at least 29 Master Editor-Publishers were members of a chamber of commerce, commercial club, or other comparable organization. Since such membership would be taken for granted by almost every Iowa newspaperman, especially in the weekly field, it is probable that as many as 55 are or were members of such groups. At least 7 were members of Rotary, 7 of Kiwanis, and 5 of Lions.

How does the Master Editor-Publisher, on the average, measure up against the standards set by the founder?

Very probably the conscientious social critic or social philosopher, in his necessary search for perfection, would find shortcomings. He would perhaps wish that more of these men had been conscious of the pressure of social change, had been more concerned with the impact of those changes on the community, and had interpreted the impact of these changes to the community. He would perhaps wish that more of them had displayed an ability to stand outside the community, and to look at it impartially, with a greater breadth of vision. He would perhaps wish for less adherence to the status quo. He might wish more interest in and reliance upon research as a way of finding the deeper causes of such problems as juvenile delinquency, rather than dealing with one or two situations which may have been more or less surface indications, effects rather than causes. He might wish that more of these men had had adequate time for thinking, and for meditation, and for reading and discussion — to make them fuller men, and men of greater understanding.

But the social critic would know, too, that a man is part of his environment, that he cannot always stand apart to look at it, that the economic pressures of everyday life often work against adequate time for thinking, and that the man who moves too rapidly for his own day and for his own people is not necessarily the person who has the greatest forward-moving impact upon them.

The social critic would agree also that there is evidence that these men had in considerable measure lived up to the founder's injunctions, and certainly to the first, that they "work hard." Many of them began work when wages were very low; in fact, one Master Editor-Publisher says he received no wages for the first year, and others received only a few dollars a week. At least 25 of the men, most of them among those first chosen for the honor, got their start as printers in a day when a work week of 55 or 60 hours was not uncommon.

With their hard work these men in most cases combined managerial ability. They knew the procedures and practices which would make a newspaper commercially successful. Indirect evidence of this is found in the manner in which all of them, exposed to one or more of the depressions of 1907, of the early 20's, and of the early 30's, came through financially, even though they survived with difficulty, and probably with heavy losses. Most of them earned their own money for the purchase of their first newspaper plants. In many cases, this purchase was very much a shoe-string operation, and the margin of profit, if any, was probably thin for the first years. Only a comparatively few (probably not more than 8 or 10) inherited all or any part of a newspaper property.

As for the requirement that the nominee must have "lived honorably," no scandal seems to have

touched any of these men, and encounters with the law have usually involved only such matters as traffic violations or the civil actions occasionally found necessary in settling business disagreements.

Records which are probably incomplete list 45 as having some church affiliation; some 10 denominations are represented. Twenty men are listed as Methodists, ten as Congregationalists, and five as Presbyterians; other denominations with two or more members include Lutheran, Baptist, and Christian.

The typical Master Editor-Publisher has taken rather seriously the injunction that he must have "thought soundly." This characteristic has shown itself in many ways — in the man's actions and in community life, and often most directly in his writing.

Many of these men were great writers of editorials. E. P. Chase of the *Atlantic News-Telegraph* won the 1933 Pulitzer prize for editorial writing. Many, including Joseph F. Grawe, Elmer E. Taylor, Sr., Harvey Ingham, Ed M. Smith, W. C. Jarnagin, Tom Purcell, Ward Barnes, W. C. Dewel, Don L. Berry, Frank A. Moscrip, W. Earl Hall, Ralph E. Shannon, Paul C. Smith, Vic Lovejoy, Ralph Overholser, and George C. Tucker, have won renown with their editorials, whether for vigor, good thinking, forthrightness, sharp writing, or other qualities.

ANNUAL

MASTER EDITOR-PUBLISHER AWARD

OF THE

IOWA PRESS ASSOCIATION INC.

1945

JAMES W. McCUTCHEON

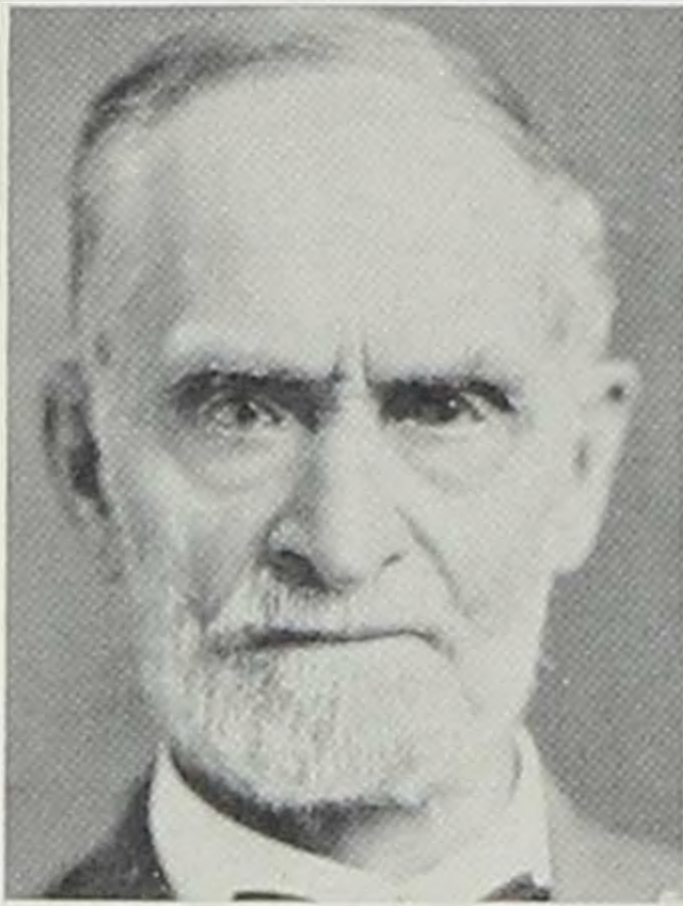
MOUNT VERNON HAWKEYE RECORD

BY A VOTE OF THE COMMITTEE OF JUDGES THAT HE HAS
WORKED HARD - LIVED HONORABLY - THOUGHT SOUNDLY

INFLUENCED UNSELFISHLY

AND IS ENTITLED TO HIGHEST HONOR IN HIS PROFESSION

1932



J. F. GRAWE



E. E. TAYLOR



HARVEY INGHAM

1933



E. M. SMITH



E. P. ADLER



W. G. RAY

1934



W. C. JARNAGIN



W. P. WORTMAN



F. A. MOSCRIP



G. L. CASWELL

1935



J. C. HARTMAN

M. A. AASGAARD

1936



J. R. RHODES

K. F. BALDRIDGE

1937



T. W. PURCELL

E. P. CHASE

V. H. LOVEJOY

1938



H. W. BARNES



J. O. ELDER



J. G. LUCAS

1939



J. M. BECK



J. M. GRIMES



SCOTT SNYDER

1940



W. C. DEWEL



C. S. ROGERS



P. C. WOODS

1941



C. N. MARVIN



FRANK JAQUA



E. P. HARRISON

1942



J. L. PAPES, SR.



L. S. BARNES

1943



D. L. BERRY



S. W. NEEDHAM



G. C. TUCKER

1944



F. W. BECKMAN



S. G. GOLDTHWAITE



R. E. OVERHOLSER

1945



F. W. HILL



J. W. MCCUTCHEON



W. S. RUPE

1946



P. A. OLSON



J. W. HAGGARD



W. E. HALL

1947



C. A. DOXSEE



H. H. SADLER

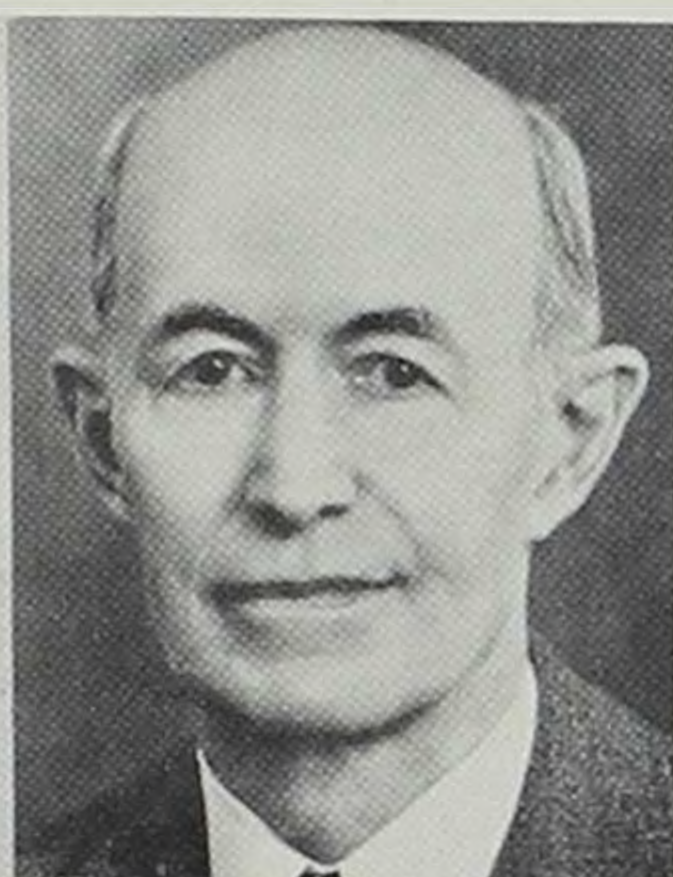


JUSTIN BARRY

1948



J. C. GILLESPIE



PHIL HOFFMANN



C. S. WALLING

1949



C. V. CAMPBELL



R. E. SHANNON

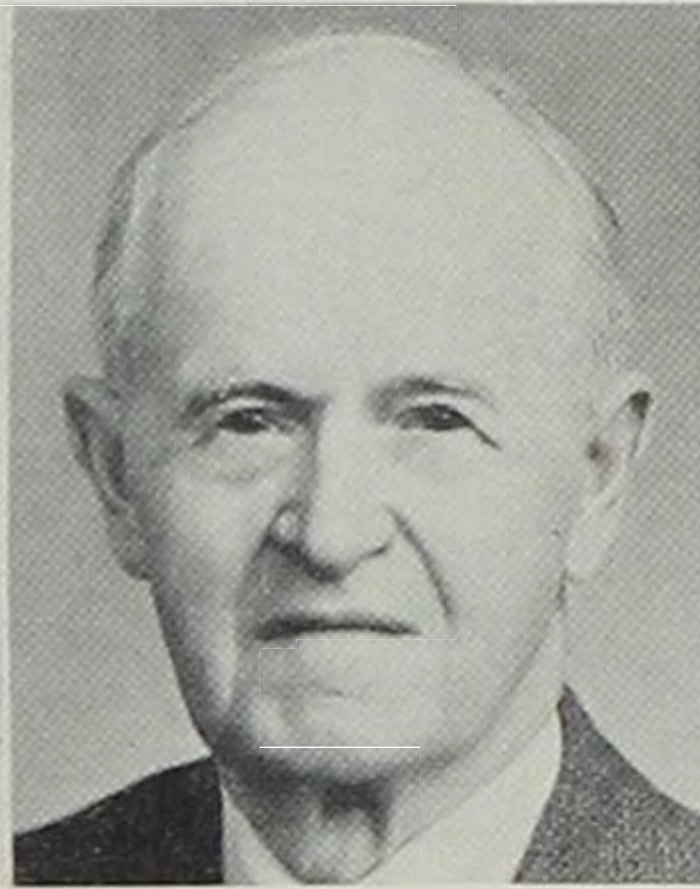


P. C. SMITH

1950



JOHN HUSTON



W. W. OVERHOLSER



S. E. TENNANT

1951



DAVID SUTHERLAND



D. E. DEWEL



J. W. WILSON

To some extent this writing has been political in nature. As might be expected in a state so long consistently Republican, most of the Master Editor-Publishers are Republicans. Two of the 58 are listed as Democrats, two as Independents, one as Independent-Republican, and 53 as Republicans. A number have been active in party affairs. E. P. Adler of the Davenport *Times* and the Lee Syndicate was for two years secretary of the Republican State Central Committee. James Rhodes of the Newton *Daily News* was a district committeeman for four years. A great many publishers have been delegates frequently to state political conventions; and Ward Barnes and Don L. Berry, among others, have been delegates to national Republican conventions. Leon Barnes of the Northwood *Anchor* has served on the Republican state platform committee; Ralph Overholser of the Red Oak *Express* in 1936 was Republican state publicity director. Paul C. Smith was chairman of the Republican State Convention in 1942.

In general, these men have conducted their news columns vigorously, with the aim of providing intensive coverage of their communities. One of the earlier Iowa Master Editor-Publishers, in a direct phrase which perhaps expresses the philosophy of life for many, wrote that his goal was "to live up to high standards, do one's best and not worry about the consequences." Another said: "I have thought that my chief duty as a citizen

was to produce an excellent newspaper, thereby serving the community well."

A concern for the general welfare is apparent in any measurement against the qualification that the men must have "influenced unselfishly." One Master Editor-Publisher has written that "generally speaking, we strive for anything that will aid the community in a constructive sense, or at least what our judgment makes us believe is constructive."

Most have been leaders in community thinking. Many have wielded an influence felt beyond local communities, as with Don L. Berry, of whom the *Des Moines Register* said editorially on April 18, 1943, at the time of his selection, that he "has not only done a unique job of reporting to and counseling his neighbors in Warren county about their local affairs; he has also made the attitudes and needs of the people in this typical rural county felt in many broad national circles. The ethical standards he has set and followed are about as sound as any we know of, and they have certainly contributed measurably to the character of and respect for the newspaper as an institution in this state."

In an editorial comment appearing April 17, 1950, the *Register* remarked that these "are men who have distinguished themselves in both journalism and community affairs. This is, of course, a redundancy, as Iowa newspapermen well know,

for distinguished service in newspapering means distinguished service in community affairs. Iowa publishers looking over their associates in other communities know that the man who is doing the best job of newspapering usually is also the man doing the best job of helping his community, through the performance of various sorts of civic duties."

Civic activities have been varied. Many winners have served as presidents or secretaries of chambers of commerce, and probably at least 40 have held directorships in such organizations. Many have been active in service clubs. Tom W. Purcell was district governor of Rotary in 1930-1931, and Duane E. Dewel of the *Kossuth County Advance* at Algona served two years as governor of his Iowa-Nebraska Kiwanis district.

Many have served on school boards, several have been elected presidents of school boards, and W. Earl Hall was a member of the State Board of Education for several years. W. G. Ray of the *Grinnell Herald-Register*, W. C. Jarnagin, W. P. Wortman of the *Malvern Leader*, J. M. Beck of the *Centerville Iowegian*, and Charles S. Rogers of the *Mount Pleasant News* have served as college trustees.

Others have been active in municipal office. Paul C. Smith is currently mayor of Rock Rapids; and W. G. Ray, M. A. Aasgaard of the *Lake Mills Graphic*, V. H. Lovejoy, and J. M. Grimes

of the *Osceola Sentinel and Tribune* have been mayors. A number have been councilmen or held appointive city offices.

Many have been elected to other government office. Ed M. Smith was Iowa's Secretary of State from 1928 to 1931. J. M. Grimes served as Iowa's State Treasurer from 1943 to 1950; previously, from 1906 to 1910, he had been a state senator in Missouri. Ed M. Smith, Grant L. Caswell, and Duane E. Dewel have been state senators; E. P. Harrison of the *Oakland Acorn*, W. G. Ray, and Justin M. Barry of the *Cherokee Daily Times* have served in the Iowa House of Representatives.

Even more important has been the continuing concern of Iowa Master Editor-Publishers with the day-to-day operation of government, for the most part at the local and the state levels, but also at the national level. This has come about in part through a natural concern with material which is live news, as well as from a direct interest in participating in civic affairs.

The group has also been distinguished by its attitude toward the profession of journalism. Probably 80 per cent have consistently attended state conventions of the Iowa Press Association or of the Iowa Daily Press Association, and nearly as many have been active in these groups.

These 21 Master Editor-Publishers have been presidents of the IPA: S. G. Goldthwaite (1917), W. P. Wortman (1918), J. C. Gillespie (1921),

Ed M. Smith (1922), George C. Tucker (1923), E. P. Harrison (1924), Kenneth F. Baldridge (1925), Thomas W. Purcell (1926), W. C. Jarnagin (1928), W. G. Ray (1929), J. G. Lucas (1930), Don L. Berry (1931), Jesse M. Beck (1932), Victor H. Lovejoy (1933), Ralph E. Overholser (1934), Charles A. Doxsee (1936), Leon S. Barnes (1939), Ward Barnes (1940), Fred W. Hill (1941), James W. McCutcheon (1942), and Paul C. Smith (1950). Grant Caswell served as managing director, W. Earl Hall, Ralph Shannon, and Duane E. Dewel as directors, and S. E. Tennant of the Colfax *Tribune* as recording secretary (since 1929).

John Huston of the Ottumwa *Courier* has been president of the Iowa Daily Press Association, W. S. Rupe of the Ames *Daily Tribune* has been vice-president, and James R. Rhodes has been a director. E. P. Adler was president of the Inland Daily Press Association in 1917-1918, Rhodes has served as a vice-president, and Ralph Shannon and John Huston have been committee members.

Kenneth Baldridge of the Bloomfield *Democrat* was president of the National Editorial Association in 1934-1935, and Fred W. Hill of the Hamburg *Reporter* was president in 1946-1947. Baldridge also served as chairman of the national code authority for nonmetropolitan printing and publishing industries in the early 1930's.

Fred W. Hill won the National Editorial Asso-

ciation outstanding community service award in 1937-1938, and in 1949 received that association's annual Amos Award "for distinguished service to nonmetropolitan newspapers of America and to the National Editorial Association." Baldrige received the award in 1950 for his work with the NRA code and as NEA president. Only 12 men have been so honored since the Amos Award was first given in 1938.

In addition to their interest in professional associations, the Master Editor-Publishers on the whole appear to have had a clear-cut feeling of the over-all responsibilities resting on journalists. They have taken their work in journalism seriously, and the social critic might well agree that their performance has for the most part been enlightened, well thought-out, and planned in what the Master Editor-Publishers conceived to be the best public interest.

Checked against the record of performance, the Iowa Master Editor-Publisher stands up well. He has set a good pattern for his contemporaries in the practice of journalism, and he has also set a good pattern for his fellows in the practice of everyday citizenship.

LESLIE G. MOELLER